

Conference Paper

Children's Museum within the Cultural Space of Modern Metropolis

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Abstract

For a long time, children's museum remained an object of research only within pedagogical studies. Such scholars as M. Yu. Yukhnevich and B. A. Stolyarov contributed greatly to the development of museum pedagogy. In this paper children's museum is viewed through the lens of culturological approach. We provide a comparative historical analysis of the children's museum development and attempt to define its meaning in contemporary society.

Keywords: children's museum, museum center, museum educational program, contemporary museum practices.

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1. Introduction

Today the role of museums in Russia is changing substantially: the notion of a museum as a space for exhibiting museum objects is becoming obsolete. At the same time, the concept of a museum object is also changing, as well as the approaches museums use in working with their audience. Among other trends, we see the rise of interest in children's audience, emerging museum centers for kids as part of the "adult museums", as well as specialized children's museums.

The first children's museum in the world was founded in 1899. Brooklyn Children's Museum benefited from the work of Anna Billings Gallup, a teacher of natural history. She believed that museum should be a space where children are provided with an opportunity not just to see various exhibits but to communicate with them, becoming participants of various educational and thematic programs.

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2. A Brief History of Children's Museums

In Russian history the idea of children's museum gained interest in the first decades of the 20th century. An important part here played Soviet pedagogue A. U. Zelenko who had studied an experience of children's museum in the United States and in 1926 published a book titled *Detskiye muzei Severnoy Ameriki (Children's Museums of North America)*. For Zelenko, children's museums were "an experimental new phenomenon; therefore, it should be as mobile as possible, adapted to rearrangements and experiments, ready to change" [3, p. 149]. A. U. Zelenko developed a children's museum project that included new bold ideas; however, its fate was similar to the first national museums: Toy Museum (Moscow, 1920–1931, in 1931 moved to Sergiyev Posad) created by N. D. Bartram, toy artist and museum activist, and Museum of Children's Book (Moscow 1934–1943) created by Ya. P. Meksin, children's book expert and museum activist. Running contrary to the dominant dogmatic pedagogy, these innovative democratic ideas could not find their place in Soviet era. Only in 1990s we see the emergence of a new wave of interest in children's museums, together with a new concept of a museum as a cultural and educational space.

In contemporary Russia design, emergence and development of children's museums follow the global trends. While in late 1990s the number of children's museums was small, today this number is growing, with new museums emerging not only in large cities but in the far-away regions. T. V. Galkina emphasizes the position occupied by children's museums among traditional "adult museums": "As a new and emerging phenomenon, contemporary Russian children's museum persistently tries to determine its place within the scope of other national museums" [2, pp. 89–90]. The challenge here is that, to define its positions among the "adult" museums, children's museum should become unique, original, very different from other museums. Today Russia has almost all types of children's museums that exist in other countries. There are children's museums developed within the framework of traditional "adult" museums as specialized divisions (e.g., children's museum center in the Museum of the History of Ekaterinburg). There are museums that form a part of different non-museum cultural-educational centers for children (e.g. municipal museum "Children's Art Gallery" in Samara, 1990); museums that exist at the intersection of cultural and educational infrastructures (e.g. Republican Children's Museum Center in Karelia, 1993); stand-alone children's museum (e.g. Fairy-Tale House "Zhili-byli" ("Once Upon a Time) in Moscow, 1993; "KidBurg" museum in Saint-Petersburg, 2009) [5]. Strictly speaking, only the latter two can be called "children's museums" – in all other cases we are dealing with the subdivisions of the "adult"

museums that develop specialized programs for kids using the same collections that form such museums' main exhibition.

3. New Museum Practices

The new paradigm of a museum as a cultural and educational space requires conditions for comprehensive artistic and pedagogical process aimed at the development of cognitive, value-laden and creative activity of children based on the children's audience needs of a free "unsupervised" play [6].

In contemporary metropolis the lines of work pursued by the museums are changing and the new museum practices are developing. The main lines of contemporary museum strategies are their exhibition, educational, communicational and interactive work. The latter fits particularly well with the purposes posed by the work with children's audience since it creates possibility for children to freely choose their behavior inside a museum, gives them opportunity to study the exhibits in more detail, collaborate within a program, interact with the museum educators and communicate with each other. "The more variable a museum program is the more opportunities such museum has to become a place of discoveries, new knowledge, first skills and techniques – a place of interest and fun for everyone" [2, p. 90].

Children's museums and subdivisions are aimed primarily at the kids of elementary and secondary school age, which presupposes collaboration with the schools and participation in school curriculum.

For preschoolers the situation is different: not all children's museums – especially the adult ones – are interested in the development of specialized programs for children aged 3 to 6, because work with this audience is very different from the traditional museum practice. Studies of children's audience showed that pre-school age should be preferred age for introducing children to the museums, because children aged 3 to 6 develop foundations of their character and general personality [1]. At this age, kids begin to explore the world, to familiarize themselves with objects and their features.

Contemporary museums use various techniques: dramatized tours, conversation tours, lesson tours etc. Museums become venues for hobby clubs, discussion clubs, roundtables, musical and literary evenings, museum holidays, craft classes, workshops, contests, games, quests etc.

One of the most efficient and long-standing programs is a program of Russian Museum (since 1993): it uses a comprehensive approach to work with children of

different age groups, starting from preschoolers and guiding them not only throughout their school studies but also during their student's years.

4. Conclusions

Children's museum occupies a special place in the cultural space of modern metropolis. The development of children's museums as a space for children's cultural and creative development is a highly relevant goal that requires not only the search for new interesting topical museum programs for children but the rethinking of the museum's role in contemporary society.

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